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McGB/WWR

Putting US Troops into Vietnam

We must seriously consider precautionary measures to "seal off" South Vietnam in such a way as to deter another Laos.

It seems almost certain that the other side will raise Vietnam issues (perhaps reunification) in 14-nation conference. Moreover, Vietnam ICC is still in existence although hardly functioning. Our sending any troops to Vietnam now or later would be violation of Geneva Accords, to which Saigon is party. But we will be violating this in any case if we increase MAAG strength, and other side will surely raise hell at the conference.

Therefore as a "half-way house", why not urge Diem to abrogate Geneva Accords before the conference begins. After it starts, he will get an even bigger black eye if he does. He could simultaneously apply for SEATO membership, and perhaps ask for SEATO troops. This would establish legal basis for our subsequent entry even if we decided not to do so promptly.

Is Pentagon contingency planning for troops to Vietnam geared too much to sensible military objectives, thus involving forces too large and unwieldy for early action? The purpose of sending forces is not to fight guerillas. It would be to establish a US "presence"; this could be accomplished by no more than a battalion supported by naval power.

Why not invite Asian SEATO states simultaneously to send token contingents? They need not actually send them on such short notice, but we could announce when we went in that they had agreed in principle to do so.

I am not convinced that we should send troops to Vietnam. But I am convinced we should carefully weigh the cost to us of waiting until conference is underway and Vietnamese situation has perhaps seriously deteriorated. Also Diem (as well as Sarit) urgently needs some reassurance in aftermath of Laos; I doubt that VP's visit or CIP alone would suffice.

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